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71.2009.085.05732



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Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Daniel F. Hyland

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THE SHRINE OF AN OPTIMIST - ABRAHAM LINCOLN

by Danial F. Hyland

Optimist Magazine Feb 1903

If ever there were a time, if ever there were a place for Optimism, it is here and now. The only safe yard stick to measure is the past, for along this road of travel have come for many generations, millions of men, and each wave has built anew upon the foundation that was laid by its predecessors. Yet, spun through the entire fabric of time and stamped upon the records, one thing stands forth clearly, that is Character. The values of the day may vary, the dust of the centuries may cover the ambitions and the greed of this long line of mankind; yet there is one who remains ever fixed in this historic record of men, and that is Abraham Lincoln.

If this be so, we must come to one definite conclusion and that is that at no time in all his life did Lincoln try to save himself alone. All of his great wisdom, all of his splendid ideals were built around seeing the good in all mankind and honestly enjoying the success of others.

Suppose you list your opportunities and your life with the struggle of Lincoln during the major part of his lifetime. Jot down your victories and your defeats, your resolve to carry on in the face of difficulties. Lincoln was past fifty years of age before he enjoyed the first measure of comfort and he found the struggle increasingly difficult; yet he was always hopeful, cheerful and above all, Optimistic. His life the altar of his hopes, he met defeat with the resolve to carry on.

When Lincoln was a young man he ran for the legislature in Illinois and was defeated. He entered business, failed and was for seventeen years paying the debt. He was engaged to a beautiful

young woman, she died. Entering politics again he ran for Congress and was once more defeated. He tried to gain an appointment in the land office but failed at that. He became candidate for the United States Senate and was badly beaten. He ran for vice-president and again he was defeated.

In spite of these great disappointments he continued to cling tenaciously to the standards he had set up early in life, with his eyes forever fixed on the goal of doing the right thing as he saw it. He continued withal to progressively move forward and in the end he was accepted not only by his own people, but by the people of the world. A man whose standard was set high, who refused all substitutions for that standard, he became the man of the ages.

In the fog of our broken dreams, with stern reality in the saddle driving us with cunning to lessen our standard, will we seek to blame whatever difficulties we may have upon the government, or upon some other source? Will we note our lessened value and cry to far heavens for the reason that such things are as they are, where the horizon is filled with misgivings? Or, shall we reset this compass and by diligently studying the life of Lincoln find some blazing truth in the fires of his Optimism? He was guided by the faith that he forever believed in, battered and knocked about through deceiving people. Political preferment denied him three times. He Lincoln, heard the auctioneer's gavel pass judgment on his business ability, he was laughed at and ridiculed by lesser men. Proudly he faced whatever the future might hold. He knew that no mere measure of politics could satisfy the popular hunger;

he realized that human hearts can find no solace in anything other than what they do for themselves.

Because he had lived among the people he had formed his standard of character early in life, and the elements that made his Nadir came with such regularity and force it would have crushed most men. Yet his tender humanness, his will to do the deed as he saw it, his defense of right as he lived it, his firmness to face the difficulties that appeared at times insurmountable - and then the end, with his task uncompleted. Yet men, and the people, as a nation reached for him in their hour of trouble, to this backwoodsman whose opportunities were zero, and found him the counterpart of their real suffering selves.

So let us with an earnest, sincere effort to see the good in all things, try to understand the other fellow's condition. Even when all things seem to fail, when dire circumstances supplant pleasant surroundings, when the going becomes tough, let us remember that millions of men have traveled the road before us and most of them have made it easier for us than it was for themselves.

Remember we are the successors of the past, yet some of us sit supinely in the midst of the present glories and cry, not for help to aid a fellowman, but for succor for ourselves. They say people do not understand the road we have traveled these past three years, definitely if we look to Lincoln we find that the way of our difficulties is up, and even now the tempo is changing.

Let us not lower the standard, let us forget not the people who are to follow us, the men yet unborn who may suffer by the letting-up we may do. If those who are our leaders hesitate

and listen to the voice of the compromiser how shall we advance? Whatever the burden is, it must be carried, the eager eye must look forward towards the horizon of a brighter day and the mind must be conscious that the way out is the way up.

Then let us face the facts stern and real as they are. Let us fortify ourselves with the character of Lincoln; let us join with all the standard bearers who have gone on before us; let us pass out of our lives the fictitious values that had no purpose nor place in them. Let us reason that the times are changing, that the road opens up the future years, that it is difficult, that it is steep, but remember that up this road, in all the past history, have come millions of men; that those who survived were men who had faith in their fellow men, faith in themselves and faith in their times, men who forgot the mistakes of the past, pressed to the greater achievements of the future.



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